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ABSTRACT

This document reports on the qualities of a good urban teacher as perceived by urban early childhood and elementary school teachers in 1988. A review of the educational literature indicates that the characteristics of good teaching reflected the time period in which the teachers lived and were prepared. This study focused on preschool, substitute, transition, English as a Second Language (ESL), and primary teachers working in the Harrisburg (Pennsylvania) City School District in Spring 1988. The survey instrument was a 36-item questionnaire developed to collect rankings of desirable teacher qualities identified in an earlier study. Data analysis yielded the following results, in order of ranked importance: (1) has an attractive and stimulating classroom; (2) provides instruction that is interesting and directed toward clear goals; (3) has good judgment; (4) applies the principles of learning; (5) is fair and impartial; (6) has a sense of humor, is cheerful, good natured, and pleasant; (7) disciplines firmly but kindly; (8) speaks clearly, in a pleasing voice; (9) uses new ideas and methods; and (10) is honest. The findings seem to reflect the methods and materials used in current teacher preparation programs, which stress the use of bulletin boards and displays, as well as a contemporary societal trend toward egocentrism, including a retreat from community involvement. A complete list of quality ranks and descriptions is included. A list of 11 references is appended. (FMW)

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Will the Real Urban Teacher Please Stand Up? A Profile of the Outstanding Urban Teacher

A Study Completed at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Funded by the Pennsylvania Academy for the Profession of Teaching

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ABSTRACT

A survey of 86 urban early childhood and elementary teachers in the spring of 1988 found that the most important quality for them to possess was to have an attractive and stimulating classroom. Urban teachers place a high value upon using good judgment, applying the principles of learning, and being fair and impartial.

"Will the Real Urban Teacher Please Stand Up?: A Profile of the Outstanding Urban Teacher"

Introduction. What makes a good teacher? Who are the truly outstanding teachers? Are they the academically talented or gifted? Are those that choose teaching less academically talented (Boyer, 1985)? Do they possess certain interpersonal, social, and service skills (Kowalski & Weaver, 1989)? It was from these questions that the framework for this study of the characteristics of the outstanding urban teacher emerged.

For centuries outstanding teachers have been identified in all cultures and societies. For example, the Ancient Greeks could point to Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato as outstanding teachers. The sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries were characterized by the contributions of such outstanding educators as Comenius, Pestolozzi, Froebel, and Rousseau. More recently individuals such as Maria Montessori, John Dewey, B. F. Skinner, and Jerome Bruner could be added to that list. These outstanding educators were recognized not only for their academic abilities and interpersonal skills, but also for their contributions to what we know about children and teaching them.

One of the first studies which attempted to identify the characteristics of a good teacher was completed by Kratz (1896). He found that a good teacher was one that was helpful, good, and kind, patient and polite, and neat. In 1905, Book found, after interviewing one thousand and sixty senior high school students, that good teachers displayed a profile which highlighted interpersonal and social skills. Good teachers "...were pleasant, cheerful, jolly, witty, even-tempered, and sociable..." (Book, 1905, p. 239.).

Since these two early studies, the good or outstanding teacher profile has undergone a myriad of investigations. Learned and Wood (1938) studied the academic abilities of teachers and compared them to students who majored in other curricula. The assumption which directed their work was that good teachers had to possess the abilities that would permit them to do well academically. Other researchers studied good teachers through the use of interviews, radio contests, observation, and rating scales (Tomlinson, 1955). From these studies as well as the studies involving teacher effectiveness, two basic

ideas began to emerge: one, good teachers possessed many skills, abilities, and talents far beyond the democratic attitudes, kindness, fairness, and professional appearance that they displayed daily in their classrooms (Tomlinson, 1955). The second idea was that the characteristics of good teaching were reflective of the time period in which the teachers lived and were prepared. If teachers were attending preparatory programs in which the emphasis was upon the individual child (Montessori, 1974), and child-centered activity (Dewey, 1964), these teachers valued the individualization of instruction. This was reinforced through research, professional literature, parent surveys, student interviews, school board directors' responses, and administrative evaluations (Hranitz, 1969). Thus, the good teacher of this time period not only recognized children as individuals who possessed talents and abilities that were uniquely theirs and theirs alone but the good teacher provided instruction that was interesting, varied, and directed toward clear goals. Good teachers wrote behavioral objectives for all of their lessons. High ratings were given to interpersonal skills such as being cheerful, good natured, and pleasant. Being knowledgeable in methods and materials of teaching was ranked in the top five (Hranitz, 1969).

In 1989, a study by Kowalski and Weaver (1989) which surveyed 1,241 outstanding teachers from 566 schools representing 54 Indiana public school districts found that "outstanding teachers in Indiana are profiled as professionals with a master's degree and more than 16 years of classroom experience. They graduated in the top 20% of their high school class and maintained an undergraduate GPA in excess of a "B"". (Kowalski and Weaver, 1989, p. 98). Most importantly, in determining who were the outstanding teachers, the emphasis shifted from interpersonal qualities of relating to children (Kratz, 1896), and recognition of the individual child (Hranitz, 1969) to academic rankings and grade point averages (Kowalski and Weaver, 1989).

More recently, a study funded by the Pennsylvania Academy for the Profession of Teaching (Hranitz and Shanoski, 1989) found that Teacher of the Year Award Winners/Nominees identified that "...[l]ove of knowledge/subject matter...[l]oves people/children...[,] and [e]nthusiasm/ [e]nergy..." (p. 4) were the three most important characteristics of today's excellent teachers. Clearly, then outstanding teachers in our classrooms must be academically talented, possess interpersonal skills, and be able to manage children and the room environment well.

Method

Subjects. The respondents selected for this study were the preschool, substitute, transition, English as a Second Language, and primary teachers, who were working in the Harrisburg City School District in the spring of 1988. The school district decided the population for this study be determined by the teachers who were attending an in-service meeting on classroom management. Eighty-six urban teachers attended the in-service meeting held in the spring of 1988. These teachers represented approximately 95% of the teachers who were teaching children from four to eight years of age.

Procedure. During the spring of 1988, meetings were held with the Director of Elementary Education and the Superintendent of the Harrisburg City Schools. The survey of urban teachers to determine the qualities of an effective early childhood urban teacher was listed as one of the objectives for an Urban Education Fellowship sponsored by the Pennsylvania Academy for the Profession of Teaching. With the cooperation of the school district, it was determined that the best way of getting the teachers to participate and to get a high rate of response was to survey them prior to an in-service meeting being held during the spring term.

The survey instruments were distributed to the teachers as they entered the auditorium. The principals, who were in attendance, were asked to monitor the number of teachers attending from their respective buildings and to estimate the number of teachers not present. The principals reported that there were only one or two teachers absent from their respective buildings. A count of the teachers present indicated that approximately 95% of the teachers were in attendance. The teachers were permitted to take as much time as they needed to complete the questionnaire. These were then collected by each principal before the in-service meeting continued.

The Instrument. A 36-item questionnaire was developed to collect the rankings given by the teachers. The items in the questionnaire were taken from a list of qualities identified by teachers in an earlier study (Hranitz, 1969) The items were listed in alphabetical order using the letter of the first word of each statement. A space was provided before each statement for the teachers to indicate their preferences. Respondents

were asked to double (xx) the most critical qualities, single (x) the important qualities, and leave blank ( ) those qualities that did not meet the above criteria.

During the spring of 1988, a pilot study of the questionnaire was undertaken when it was administered to a research and development graduate class consisting of early childhood educators. The pilot study was aimed at clarifying the directions and determining whether the tasks being requested were ones that the teachers could perform. The statements from the early childhood educators in this research class were collected and utilized to modify the instrument for administration.

Data Analysis. The differences in the ratings given each quality were analyzed by first assigning a numerical vaue to the double (xx), single (x), and blank ratings. Double (xx) was given a value of two, single (x) a value of one, and the blank, a value of zero. The number of tallies a quality received in each of the above categories was recorded. The tabulations were completed by multiplying the tallies with the numerical values for each of the ratings. A mean score for each quality was computed. The quality that received the highest mean score was ranked number one, the next two, respectively.

Results

The most critical quality for an urban teacher to possess according to the Harrisburg teachers was having an attractive and stimulating classroom. Instruction that was interesting, directed toward clear goals was ranked second. The qualities ranked three through nine respectively were: uses good judgment; applies the principles of learning; fair and impartial; sense of humor; cheerful, good-natured, pleasant; discipline is firm but kind; pleasing voice; speaks clearly; progressive, uses new ideas, methods, and materials; and honest. Believes in God, devotes time to school extra curricular activities, and gives the children good grades received the lowest rankings.

Table 1

Qualities of a Good Urban Teacher

Mean	Quality Rank and Description
7.2674	1. Classroom is attractive and stimulating.

Table 1 (Continued)

Qualities of a Good Urban Teacher

Mean	Quality Rank and Description
7.2093	2. Instruction is interesting, varied, and directed towards clear goals.
6.9767	3. Uses good judgment.
6.8605	4. Applies the principles of learning.
6.8023	5. Fair, impartial.
6.7442	6. Sense of humor, cheerful, good-natured, pleasant.
6.5116	7. Discipline is firm, but kind.
6.5116	7. Pleasing voice, speaks clearly.
6.4535	8. Progressive; uses new ideas, methods, and materials.
6.3372	9. Honest.
6.2791	10. Recognizes individual differences; understands the whole child.
6.2791	10. Patient.
6.2791	10. Resourceful.
6.2209	11. Kind, compassionate.
6.2209	11. Uses praise and commendation.
6.2209	11. Polite.
6.0465	12. Loyal and dedicated to the profession.
6.0465	12. Displays a high degree of enthusiasm.
5.9884	13. Loves children.
5.9884	13. Responsible.
5.9884	13. Shows an interest in the community.
5.9884	13. Sympathetic.
5.9302	14. Cooperates with administrators.
5.9302	14. Good health.
5.9302	14. Neat personal appearance.
5.1744	15. Prompt and punctual.
5.1163	16. Permits a democratic atmosphere.
4.9419	17. Helpful in studies.

Table 1 (Continued)

Qualities of a Good Urban Teacher

Mean	Quality Rank and Description
4.186	18. Persistence.
2.7326	19. Gives homework.
2.6744	20. Courageous.
2.4419	21. A patriotic American.
2.3837	22. Academic record show evidence of high grades.
2.1512	23. Believes in God.
2.0930	24. Devotes time to school extra curricular activities.
1.3953	25. Gives the children good grades.

n=86

Discussion

Much is known about what teachers do in the classroom and how effective they can be with children. The line of inquiry pursued in this study was to have urban teachers, who represent the early childhood years (PreKindergarten through Grade 3), identify the qualities that they believe are important for teachers today. This study utilized the qualities identified in a previous study. No attempt was made to correlate the data from these two studies because of the numbers of teachers involved and the nature of the conditions under which the data was gathered. Of interest to this study, was the ranking that the urban teachers attributed to qualities of good teachers identified twenty years ago.

In conclusion, the urban teachers surveyed placed emphasis upon having an attractive and stimulating classroom. This high ranking reflects the methods and materials classes found in all teacher preparation programs which stress the use of bulletin boards and displays. Urban teachers have a high regard for those who use good judgment, apply the principles of learning, and are fair and impartial. Professional organizations and teacher training programs have focused much of their literature on the teacher as decision

maker and classroom manager, and upon the needs of parents and minorities. Being a patriotic American, believing in God, and devoting time to school extra curricular activities received some of the lowest rankings. Sociologists point out that we are rapidly becoming a nation of egocentric individuals retreating from community involvement and centered upon satisfying our own needs. Data from this study supports the notion that the teachers in this group are reflective of society today.

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